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# MY FATHER TAUGHT ME TO OPEN MY EYES

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My father has always loved farming. He is 72 years old, but the smell of the farm, the sounds from the barn, and the whistles of the breeze blowing through the plants still bring a smile to his face. Sadly, his love for the land is no longer enough to keep his farm going. Hard work on the farm does not guarantee success.

Farmers continue to face many challenges ranging from low yields, poor soil fertility, land degradation, lack of markets, pests and diseases, and extreme weather due to climate change. Thus farmers now need new information, now more than ever on how to solve issues affecting them and to adopt new farming practices.

One of the biggest challenges in Kenyan agriculture is how to get relevant information to farmers using a medium they can easily access. To reach out to the farmer, various media have been used with varied success.

In Africa, radio is commonly referred to as the “farmer’s best friend”. This is mainly because it is portable and has no boundaries. It is the only medium which allows farmers to do their chores while listening to farming information.

Farmers take radios with them when milking and even during the day of working in the fields. It is not

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uncommon to see a radio hanging on the branch of a tree. Unfortunately, radio lacks a crucial ingredient: visuals. Showing a picture of a Striga weed is much easier, and more accurate, than describing what it looks like.

I produce radio programmes for farmers. My programme airs every Thursday on Kenya’s national broadcaster, Kenya Broadcasting Corporation. Just when the farm family has finished dinner and they are preparing to go to bed, I give them something to sleep on.

My father is my biggest fan and my greatest critic. I take him seriously because I know his voice represents that of other farmers. One day as we shared a cup of coffee he said, “For a farmer, seeing is believing, son. Farmers need to see what you are talking about. We cannot see the soil you are talking about, or tell what kind of cows the farmer has and these are what matters most to us”. This encouraged me to start working with illustrated media.



*Video gives a personal touch to stories about farmers and their innovations.*

When you put some clever words together, and add some nice pictures in a creative layout, you have a magazine. This is a portable medium which can easily explain step by step certain farmer innovations. As the

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literacy levels continue to rise in Africa, more farmers are turning to magazines as a source of information on how they can improve their livelihoods.

It dawned on me that I can transcribe my radio programmes, complete with photos of farmers and their innovations, and publish them on our Magazine, *The Organic Farmer Magazine*. The Magazine carries stories on farmer innovations, experiences and success stories on ecological, sustainable agriculture. The editor liked the idea. Listeners now have a chance to see visuals of my programme and even store the stories for future reference. They can see photos of different animal breeds, farming innovations, diseases and pests in fine colour photographs.

With time, from my experience of working in radio and observing farmers reading the magazine, I realised that despite the advantages of the magazine, radio is still a more personal media. Magazine lacks the human feel to it. Lack of audio gives it a detached touch which has been a turn off to many farmers.

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Videos are becoming increasingly popular among farmers. They are based on the concept that a farmer always looks over her fence to her neighbour’s field to see what she can learn. The videos show stories of ordinary farmers, facing challenges which other farmers are facing and the steps that they take to solve the problem. This is more personal because you get to see real people, hear the emotions in their voices and see them work towards a solution.

Lady luck smiled at me when I was among the few chosen ones selected to undergo a farmer-to-farmer video training by Access Agriculture. I was trained to write scripts, produce, edit and disseminate videos. It was wonderful working and sharing experiences with other colleagues from Africa on video production. We produced and disseminated a farmer training video on how to add value to kale by drying it and then selling it when prices rise during dry season. My greatest joy came after finishing the video, and listening to the excited voices of the farmers as they discussed what they were seeing on the screen.

In Africa where many households lack electricity or cannot afford the equipment to watch videos, many farmers are missing out on this great medium. Fortunately, there are now projectors with rechargeable batteries which can be used to screen farmer-to-farmer videos. Still, more could be done to ensure that more farmers benefit from video. Some farmers are also starting to watch videos on their cell phones.

You may wonder which medium is the farmers’ best friend? The jury is still out there. Perhaps the solution is to have as many friends as possible. Combined, the different media may be able to achieve the greatest impact on the farm.

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